

## THE VALUE OF HIGHWAY TRANSPORT SURVEYS\*

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TO give a concrete picture of the intrinsic wealth of the world, statisticians sometimes resort to the device of tabulating the debts that are carried by the various nations. The world war, in demonstrating the staggering total of debt which the fighting nations could shoulder and still remain economically sound, was a revelation of uncounted resources in world wealth both to the laity and to many business men who had considered themselves well informed.

In the field of highway transport there has been a colossal number of failures, and reports of new transportation companies that have failed are received almost daily. If these debts, the money losses represented by these failures—failures due in a large part to the absence of transport surveys—were the sole reason for the development of such surveys, their value would run into millions.

### Greater Service to Public

Insurance against failure is, however, but a small part of the real value of highway transport surveys. Many companies in existence to-day would, if such investigations were generally resorted to, be able to render greater service to the public and make increasing profits for themselves, and these surveys would, undoubtedly, establish the desirability of highway transportation lines where as yet such lines have not even been thought of.

The prevalence of failures, paralleling the failures in the automotive industry in its early days, and the number of lines that are operating with a minimum of benefit to themselves and to their public, indicates a most cursory analysis of the territory to be served, or no analysis at all. Many firms are floundering without chart or compass, and we should all do all in our power to correct the prevalent opinion that all that is necessary is to buy a motor truck of any make you please and any capacity offered, to start it operating over any road available and during any time of the day or week when the driver feels like it, and to charge any price for his services that may come into his head just so long as it is lower than any other price charged for transportation between the points in question.

Just as long as the public has this picture of motor transport lines, just so long will the motor truck incompletely realize its effectiveness. That it can be effective has been proven beyond a doubt. As a mechanical device it has demonstrated its dependability and durability, and we have enough experience to know that economically it can perform, and must be made to perform more and more, its function as part of the transportation system of this country.

### Many Pressing Business Problems

We are considering the value of highway transport surveys at a time when many business problems of vital importance are pressing for solution. Living costs are high. Labor is scarce. The railroad car shortage is acute and the thousand problems of production are crowding in upon us daily. In all of these problems of our complex business life, there is no factor that affects every phase of economic activity more fundamentally than does transportation. It is, we might say, the very life blood of business, and everything that was can do to increase transportation facilities, decrease transportation costs and shorten the time in transit is a vital benefit. Highway transport surveys are, then, not only desirable, but at the present juncture of business conditions they are fundamentally necessary.

If we are to survey the field in the broadest and most constructive manner, we must do so in conjunction with a survey of other and longer established means of transportation, especially the steam and electric railways. As an aid

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to these already existing systems—extending their usefulness in many territories and even replacing them where such practice proves economically desirable, the motor truck has a tremendous field of usefulness. Just where this usefulness begins and ends, how to cover all territories thoroughly and yet avoid duplication of effort, can only be ascertained by complete and far-reaching surveys.

Traffic experts of the railroads themselves are giving deep thought to the availability of the motor truck in supplementing their present facilities. The present shortage of both track mileage and of freight cars makes the subject a most pressing one for the railroads and a most encouraging one for those who are interested more especially in the automotive branch of transportation.

According to figures from the Interstate Commerce Commission, the total single track mileage of the United States, January 1st, 1918, was 253,626 miles, and statistics show that the railroad mileage in that country has decreased instead of increased. Last year 689 miles of line were abandoned. This exceeds by three miles the mileage of new lines built during the year. Furthermore, 1919 was the third year in succession in which reports have shown the mileage abandoned to have exceeded the mileage of new lines built. During the three years from 1917 to 1919, inclusive, operation was abandoned on 3,319 miles of lines, and in the same period only 2,386 miles in extensions, branches and new lines were completed and placed in service. Thus, during this period there has been an actual decrease of 933 miles in the mileage of railroads in the United States. It is interesting to note that this tendency to decrease railroad mileage is shown in all three railroad districts—eastern, southern and western.

### Shortage of Freight Cars

These figures are taken from "Railway Age," which is also authority for the statement that the greatest freight car surplus ever recorded on the American railroads occurred in March, 1919, when there were 450,000 cars idle; that to-day there is a shortage of 570,000 cars; that the railroads are at present unable to handle all the traffic that is offered to them, and that while the present traffic is unusually heavy, further increases can be expected within the next few years. Records of past performances indicate that the future business cannot be handled without serious shortages of equipment unless a great many additional cars are acquired.

In addition to this tremendous freight car shortage, there is also a great shortage in motive power. It is estimated that nearly 8,000 units, of 60,000 lbs. average tractive effort, should be built during the next three years to take care of freight traffic alone.

Director-General Walker D. Hines of the American Railroad Administration is quoted in an address before the American Railway Guild, November 18th, as saying:—

"As well as I can estimate the situation, I believe we are likely to have a large railroad traffic in this country for some time to come. During the war many of the normal demands of the public had to go unsatisfied; there was much building which had to be postponed, and many sorts of activities had to remain in abeyance. The opportunity has now come to satisfy those demands, and the building that is beginning to develop and the other activities which are now getting back to a normal basis, create a demand for a very large railroad traffic. So I think the railroads must be prepared to handle a large business for a considerable period."

### Insufficient Terminal Facilities

"Railway Age" is also responsible for the statement that:—

"Insufficient terminal facilities constitute a weak link in the American transportation system. Under government control the consolidation of forces and facilities was greatly expanded.

"The outlook for a continuance of unification is not propitious, the consensus of opinion being that it is an ex-